



From the desk of
Representative Jim Moeller

January 2005



Dear Neighbor:

I hope you and your family have gotten the new year off to a safe and peaceful start.

2005. I can hardly believe it! Weren't we just fretting over the "Y2K" problem? And now we're halfway through the first decade of the new century.

The Legislature is in session. Our state's \$1.8 billion revenue-shortfall will place particular stress on writing a new budget. A big part of our overall agenda involves health care, education, and economic development. Today, I'm reviewing related topics that will take up most of my attention. I believe these issues mean the most for Clark County families and businesses.

Best wishes — and thank you for being interested in *your* Washington State Legislature!

A handwritten signature of Jim Moeller in black ink.

Jim Moeller
State Representative
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✓ Health care:

If you aren't confident about your family's well-being, what else matters?

Health care — when you peel away all the rhetoric and get it down to its essence — is a basic human right. It seems to me that most people see coverage for needed medicine and other basic health services as part of their family's investment “portfolio.” A family's health insurance is an asset — these days more than ever, it's asset-protection. It's natural that folks who have it want to protect it. I believe it's just as natural that citizens without basic coverage should have a right to get it.

This session, we've resumed the drive to make health care more affordable — more affordable for both the private sector *and* the public sector, as well as for citizens and families (especially children!).

I'm not talking simply about medical-malpractice reform. But yes, that debate is a large part of the discussion. Representative Fromhold and I have been going over the issue with interested doctors and lawyers since the last legislative session. It is imperative that we bring down the malpractice-insurance premiums for physicians — and lift up the quality-of-care for patients. I'm also committed to helping more businesses assist their employees in getting coverage.

You'll recall the large revenue-shortfall I mentioned earlier. I intend to guard against a bias to which some folks cling. It's a bias toward “fixing” a budget problem on the backs of the working poor (and on the backs of other citizens who've been shut out of the so-called economic recovery).

Mental-health parity is another key issue in the health-care discussion. A bill before us again this session would direct that insurance plans provide the same level of coverage for mental-health services as for medical or surgical services. This isn't expensive to cover — and it recognizes that people can be emotionally ill, too.

Only a small percentage of people with mental-health problems actually get treatment. So what do we do? Well, I say that making sure our fellow citizens obtain treatment they need is the *right thing* to do. **If you can't support this idea from a humanitarian perspective, consider this: Mental-health treatment today is less expensive than an emergency room tomorrow — or a prison the next day.**



✓ Veterans:

We have a duty to provide decent lives for people who've put their lives on the line

We wouldn't even be having this discussion without the sacrifices of our veterans. The men and women who've served their country — citizens who put themselves squarely in harm's way — shouldn't be ignored after their time in the service. People coming home from Iraq or Afghanistan are facing unique challenges, and indigent veterans and their families are

especially vulnerable. But a current state law regarding the provision of assistance hasn't been updated in almost a hundred years!

The bottom line is this: We need to see to it that the needs of our veterans are met in a timely and efficient manner. There is a great demand for services such as transitional housing, for example, as well as counseling or a ride to medical-appointments. In our own Clark County, the veterans organization needs to be able to offer not just a handout — but a *hand up*!

I'm sponsoring legislation that provides more flexibility for local governments to put the Veterans Assistance Fund to good and appropriate use. Counties that don't already have a veterans advisory board would establish such a board to coordinate the important work of helping veterans. The boards (entirely consisting of veterans) work to promote cooperation among veterans and elected officials — to make doubly certain that no one falls through the cracks.

In writing this proposal, I've worked with key veterans organizations and elected officials around the state. This legislation has their enthusiastic support.



✓ **Democracy:**

*Fair and equal access to voting
is the very foundation of our system*

Democracy. What's more basic to our country's brand of democracy than *counting everyone's vote* — and making sure that *everyone's vote counts*? Now, I know that the 2000 presidential election (not to mention the one this last time around) and our own incredibly close 2004 governor's race are the “poster elections,” so to speak, for the importance of voting. Certainly, we're looking at serious election-reform measures to make sure citizens are confident in their standing in the voting process.

I want to say a few words about a specific proposal — it's called instant-runoff voting — that I continue advocating in Olympia.

My legislation would let the city of Vancouver carry out an instant-runoff-voting pilot project. The goal is to see if this type of election-procedure for our local, nonpartisan offices is a good idea for all Washington communities. In instant-runoff voting, the winning candidate for nonpartisan office is the one who receives a majority of votes at the outset of the election. The system essentially eliminates primary elections.

Although instant-runoff voting is used all over the world, our current state law precludes it here. Most Vancouver citizens already support the idea. This new system would do two things: Reduce election costs and recharge our citizens' interest in the voting process.

In an instant-runoff system, a voter ranks candidates — indicating a first choice, a second choice, and so on. (The voter doesn't just select his or her No. 1 candidate, which is the system used today.) A candidate with a majority of votes is the winner. If none of the candidates gets a majority, the last-place candidate is eliminated. Then, the winner is determined by which candidate receives the most second-choice votes from people who had supported the candidate who was eliminated. The process goes on, if necessary, until a candidate receives a majority of the total votes.

In the recent race for governor, by the way, instant-runoff voting could have simplified the election — and resulted in a clear voters' choice winning the race.



✓ **Other matters:**

*Yes, I'm again targeting absurd
tax breaks for country-club dues and fees!*

Country-club dues? Enough already! I'm sick and tired of our state doling out *welfare* for something that's obviously a luxury: **tax breaks for country-club dues and initiation fees.**

We should emphasize fairness and balance in government policies. That goes for tax policies as much as it goes for any other part of government. These kinds of tax breaks, after all, represent lost revenue — we won't have this money to fund important programs for families and communities.

I'm sponsoring a bill to stop this public dole. The way I see it, we have "two Washingtons" these days: A lot of people are scrambling to put the right food on the table — but at the same time, a few people are scrambling to put the write-offs in the bank.

Tax incentives can be beneficial for a new, struggling business or established business that needs a break to regain a competitive edge. **But we need to be more strategic with these breaks — and we need to require performance-audits for all current and future exemptions.** Accountability should be the key word for both government and business when it comes to this taxpayer money. With performance-audits, the taxpayers could be assured they're getting the benefit promised by the industry or business when it came asking for public money. If not, the exemption could be canceled — and the money used for other priorities.

This session, I'm also sponsoring "The Safe Kids Act of 2005" — a measure encouraging the safe storage of firearms. My proposal states that a person could be charged with reckless endangerment if he or she stores or leaves a loaded firearm in a location where the person knows, or reasonably should know, that a child is likely to gain access — and a child does in fact obtain possession of the loaded firearm.

When selling a firearm, according to other terms of my legislation, every dealer must offer to sell or give the purchaser a lockbox, a gun safe, a lock, or some other device that prevents the firearm from discharging.



For more information — or to express your comments:

Representative Jim Moeller

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